

## CONTENTS

Foreword

xi

On the Ancestors of God According to the Flesh

I

On the Old Testament Saints

7

On Saint John the Baptist

17

On Saints Peter and Paul

31

On Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian

39

On Saint Demetrius the Myrrhstreamer

47

On All Saints

59

## ON THE ANCESTORS OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

**W**HEN THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son of God took flesh for us of the Virgin and, through His way of life in the flesh, fulfilled the law given by Moses (*cf.* Matt. 5:17, Rom. 10:4), perfected the law of grace and transformed that old law for our Church, the Hebrew race was expelled from the sacred Congregation and we were brought in instead, the elect from among the Gentiles, whom the Lord unites with Himself and the Father. He adopts us as true sons and brothers, and – Oh ineffable love for mankind! – even as His parents. “For whosoever”, he says, “shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50).

In church today, however, we celebrate the forefathers, most of whom were Hebrews by race. For what reason? So that all of us may learn that the Hebrews were not disinherited nor the Gentiles adopted as sons in a way that was unjust, unreasonable or unworthy of God who did these things and made these changes. Rather, just as among those Gentiles who were called, only the obedient were chosen for kinship with God, so the race of Israel, and Adam’s descendants down to Israel’s time, were a great multitude, but only those among them who lived according to God’s will were true Israelites. To them the prophecies belonged, through them future events were

## ON THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

**D**AVID INDICATES that our Lord Jesus Christ has no genealogy with regard to His divinity (Ps. 110:4), Isaiah says the same (Isa. 53:8), and later so does the apostle (Heb. 7:3). How can the descent be traced of Him “who is in the beginning, and is with God, and is God, and is the Word and Son of God” (*cf.* John 1:1–2, 18)? He does not have a Father who was before Him, and shares with His Father “a name which is above every name” and all speech (Phil. 2:9). For the most part, genealogies are traced back through different surnames; but there is no surname for God (*cf.* Gen. 32:29), and whatever may be said of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, They are one and do not differ in any respect.

Impossible to recount is Christ’s descent according to His divinity, but His ancestry according to His human nature can be traced, since He who deigned to become Son of man in order to save mankind was the offspring of men. And it is this genealogy of His that two of the evangelists, Matthew and Luke, recorded. But although Matthew, in the passage from his Gospel read today, begins with those born first, he makes no mention of anyone before Abraham. He traces the line down from Abraham until he reaches Joseph to whom, by divine dispensation, the Virgin Mother of God was betrothed (Matt. 1:1–16), being of the same tribe and homeland as him, that her own stock might be shown from this

## ON SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

**I**F THE DEATH OF THE SAINTS is precious (Ps. 116:15) and the just are remembered with praise (Prov. 10:7 Lxx), it is even more fitting for us to commemorate John, the highest summit of holy and righteous men, by extolling him. He leapt in the womb in anticipation of the Word of God who took flesh for our sake (Luke 1:41); he was His Forerunner and went before Him as His herald, and the Lord in turn proclaimed and bore witness that John was superior to all the prophets, saints and just men down through the ages (*cf.* Luke 7:28). Everything about him surpasses human speech, and the only-begotten Son of God witnessed to him and honoured him, and he has no need of any tribute from us. But this does not mean that we should keep silent and fail to honour with our words, as best we can, the one whom the Scriptures refer to as “the voice” of the sublime Word (Matt. 3:3, *cf.* Isa. 40:3 Lxx). On the contrary, the fact that he was proclaimed to be so great and witnessed to by Christ, the Lord of all, should move every tongue to sing his praises as much as it can. Not that we can add to his glory in any way – how could we? – but in order to pay our debt individually and together by recounting the wonders surrounding him and celebrating them in song.

The whole life of the greatest man born of woman was a supreme miracle. John was a prophet and much more than a

## ON SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

**T**HE COMMEMORATION of each of the saints on the appointed feastday is an occasion for town and country, citizens and their rulers to share in rejoicing, and brings great benefit to all who celebrate. “The memory of the just is praised”, says the wise Solomon (Prov. 10:7 Lxx), “When the righteous is praised the people will rejoice” (*cf.* Prov. 29:2 Lxx). If a lamp is lit at night, its light shines for the service and enjoyment of everyone present. Similarly, through such commemorations, each saint’s God-pleasing course, his blessed end, and the grace bestowed on him by God, because of the purity of his life, bring spiritual joy and benefit to the whole congregation, like a bright flaming torch set in our midst. When the land bears a good harvest everyone rejoices, not just the farmers (for we all benefit from the earth’s produce); so the fruits which the saints bring forth for God through their virtue delight not only the Husbandman of souls, but all of us, being set before us for the common good and pleasure of our souls. During their earthly lives, all the saints are an incentive to virtue for those who hear and see them with understanding, for they are human icons of excellence, animated pillars of goodness, and living books, which teach us the way to better things. Afterwards, when they depart this life, the benefit we gain from them is kept alive for ever through the remembrance of their

## ON SAINT DEMETRIUS THE MYRRHSTREAMER

“**H**OW PRECIOUS are thy friends unto me, O God! How great are their leaders”, says David, the most inspired singer of all time (Ps. 139:17 Lxx). The leaders of the company of the apostles are the chief apostles; of the list of the prophets, those referred to as having seen God; of the whole assembly of sacred teachers and holy men, those called great in accordance with the promise of the Saviour of all (Matt. 5:19); and of Christ’s martyrs, obviously the Greatmartyrs. Clearly conspicuous among these, and rising above most of them in his excellence, is the one we celebrate and honour especially today, a native Thessalonian, fellow citizen, and the guardian of our city, noble wonder of the world and adornment of the Church, Demetrius the Wonderworker and Myrrhstreamer, who was great in all respects. For among martyrs he is as a great luminary among stars, holding forth the word of eternal life (Phil. 2:16), encompassed more especially by the light of the rays of the divine dawn, and outshining most of the others. Has he not also been endowed with the grace of prophecy? If, then, he has been adorned with prophetic power, is he deemed unworthy of the ministry and office of apostle and teacher? And if he was indeed honoured with these, does he lack the asceticism of holy men, or their lifelong radiance? Certainly not. Following some, equalling others, the leader of

## ON ALL SAINTS

**T**RULY “GOD IS GLORIOUS in his saints” (Ps. 68:35 Lxx). Let us call to mind the martyrs’ superhuman struggles, how in the weakness of their flesh they put to shame the evil one’s strength, disregarding pain and wounds as they struggled bodily against fire, sword, all different kinds of deadly tortures, patiently resisting while their flesh was cut, their joints dislocated and their bones crushed, and keeping the confession of faith in Christ in its integrity, complete, unharmed and unshaken. As a result there were bestowed on them the incontrovertible wisdom of the Spirit and the power to work miracles. Let us consider the patience of holy men and women, how they willingly endured long periods of fasting, vigil and various other physical hardships as though they were not in the body, battling to the end against evil passions and all sorts of sin, in the invincible inner warfare against principalities, powers and spiritual wickedness (Eph. 6:12). They wore away their outer selves and made them useless, but their inner man was renewed and deified by Him from whom they also received gifts of healing and mighty works. When we think on these matters and understand that they surpass human nature, we are filled with wonder and glorify God who gave them such grace and power. For even if their intentions were good and noble, without God’s strength they could not have gone beyond the